

## **Why Resort Ministries?**

*To meet People with the Gospel of Jesus Christ in interesting ways!*

by Chris Stewart

Where do you go when you want to relax? What do you do to relieve stress? How do you try to spend time with the ones you love? What is your “lifestyle sport”? How do you try to “balance” your life physically and/or mentally? People seek resort and leisure activities and settings out for these and other reasons.

One of the great things about the people in most leisure activities and settings is they are generally there seeking interaction with others. In many ways they drop their guard and are more open to hear and accept those around them. Thus, leisure time may provide the best opportunity for sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with people who never attend church gatherings.

Resort ministries are tools to reach those who live at, work in, and visit leisure settings. The many tools and methods used in resort ministries help to earn the right to speak with people about the Christian faith. Their curiosity is often sparked by the uniqueness of such ministries and the fact they are met where they are. Then, they are open to hear about the vibrant, loving, life-changing Christ.

## **Why River Ministries?**

Rivers are powerful and majestic. They sculpt the land and seem to have an uncanny, mesmerizing draw on people. In the 47th chapter of Ezekiel, a vision is told of the mighty river that flows from the altar of God. This river transforms the area into a vibrant life-giving place.

As Christians we are to flow this river. John 7:38 reminds us that if we believe in Jesus, the river will flow from within us out of the altar of God in our heart. With such Biblical imagery, it seems natural that rivers should be places where we can easily reach out to others with God’s love.

Here are some ways Ocoee Resort Ministry has discovered to do evangelism in river settings:

### **WATERING HOLE**

The Watering Hole is a hospitality table offering cold cups of water, cold fruit flavored drinks, salvation bracelets, and Gospel tract souvenir maps to rafters as they exit the river. The ministry provides refreshments and crowd control while sharing the love of God.

Harold tells the rafters that there are free refreshments as they come ashore and helps to direct people out of the way so river guides can load the rafts.

Both Phillip and Phyllis are behind the table making sure there are plenty of filled cups and souvenirs. Chuck and Janet R. are policing the area making sure all trash is put into the trashcans.

And, Claries and Tillie are talking with the bus drivers and rafters answering their questions.

### **PRAYER/MINISTRY HIKES**

Groups of people are taken to the river and guided in prayer walking along the river. Key areas that are prayed for are gathering spots for kayakers, stopping points for bus drivers, and put-in and take-out locations. During the prayer walks, opportunities for one-on-one conversations often happen. These conversations are steered toward spiritual matters and can develop into Gospel presentations.

### **UP-RIVER**

Kayakers who need a lift to the put-in or back to their vehicle are provided a free taxi service. This ride generally takes four to seven minutes. During that time a couple or team of three (comprised of males and females) are working together to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. One is the designated driver. One is the prayer warrior. And, one is the talker.

### **RIVER COMMUNITY MEAL**

Friday nights after the river closes (7ish PM), churches provide good home cooked food for 50-100+ river guides, bus drivers, and store workers. This is a time of sitting around a common table, playing together, and discussing Biblical principles. A typical format is supper, volleyball or some other activity, and closing out with a group discussion time (Bible study).

## RIVER CHAPLIANS

Individuals willing to work as river guides, bus drivers, or receptionist are helped in securing jobs at river outfitters. Through strong Christian work ethics and obtaining opportunities to share their beliefs with their co-workers, these individuals become examples and ministers on the river.

## BEACH REACH

Beach in Tennessee? Well, we have lakes and on those lakes the Forest Service has brought in sand and turned a mere lake, into a lovely beach setting. We take groups out to hand out salvations bracelets, do face painting, clowning, play with slipdisc and sand toys, any other way a team can think of to get involved with the people. Ministry team members will be asked to wear t-shirt and shorts at all times to help represent Christ in a modest fashion.

# A Resort Evangelism Strategy

## *Doing Evangelism when You Can Not Start an Evangelistic Conversation*

*By Chris Stewart*

Often times we find ourselves in Federal, State, or private, secular facilities doing resort and leisure ministries. When given permission to go into such places, there are often limitations made. One of the main limitations is, “We don’t want you coming in here pushing your beliefs on our guests.” Basically this means they do not want us to start an evangelistic conversation.

On the other hand, resort and leisure settings are places where people go for refreshment and to quench an inner thirst. A setting very similar to one we find Jesus in at Jacob’s well. John chapter 4 is a record of the events that took place there. We can use Jesus’ example to know how we can do evangelism in resort and leisure settings without openly starting an evangelistic conversation.

First, Jesus started by putting himself where the woman was. He did not require her to come to his territory; nor did He force his way into her territory. Instead, He met her in “neutral” territory. Also, Jesus let the woman know He, too, was there because He was tired and thirsty, just as she was. The woman, therefore, was not likely to have put up barriers that would have prevented or negatively prejudiced her hearing the Spirit’s call.

Resort and leisure settings are “neutral” territories. People enter such places often hurting and seeking but at the same time allowing their “guards” to drop. They want to find others there like themselves. When we go to these settings, we must be willing to meet people where they are. Without trivializing the Gospel, we must present ourselves in a fashion that complements the setting letting others know we are there for similar reasons as they are. Jesus shows us that it is okay to sit by the well for a conversation rather than stand on the well to “preach.”

Secondly, Jesus illustrated that we do not have to start a spiritual conversation in order to have an evangelistic conversation. Jesus knew the women at the well needed to talk about such matters, but he also knew that she was not expecting to do so. Therefore, He allowed her the freedom to move the conversation in that direction. By simply answering her questions with leading responses, He opened the door for her to ask him to tell her about his “beliefs.”

In resort and leisure settings, people are not necessarily expecting to discuss spiritual matters; nor are they necessarily willing to listen to what you have to say. However, if they are the ones asking the questions, they will want to know the answers. By witnessing to people in this manner, we can operate within the limitations of not “pushing our beliefs on the guests.” We are giving the guest and/or employees the opportunity to engage us in spiritual and evangelistic conversations.

These are but two things Jesus can teach us about doing evangelism in resort and leisure settings. Take the time to reread John 4 and other accounts of Jesus ministering and witnessing. Allow the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to see unique ways of turning the limitations of man into opportunities to get people more interested in hearing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

# **Working with Secular Management and in National Forest and State Park Properties**

Most of your contacts this summer will be brief. Much time, prayer, and energy have already been invested in relationships with secular personnel who are coordinating your activities. Working with these people is a delicate matter; they control your access to those who need to hear about our God's love, and many of them need to hear the message themselves. Therefore, you must operate under the following guidelines.

1. This is a business relationship. This is their turf. You are offering them a service for their patrons.
2. You must always respect the management's wishes and do, as they request, no matter how it seems to limit your witness. If you cross the lines they have set, you blow our witness with them and the rest of the management staff at the site. You not only blow it for your team, but for future teams who may be allowed to work at the site as well.
3. Always be courteous and appreciative for the opportunity to serve at their site.
4. Watch your words. Translate Baptist and Christian terms to phrases they will understand. We do not want to hide behind our Baptist phrases or intimidate them with our language, but we don't want to appear less than we are, either. Use words and phrases that describe activities in ways that will not confuse or scare them.
5. Secular personnel are probably always a bit wary about who we are and what our motives are. We must show them that we are normal, fun-loving people. We must prove to them we are not going to take our Bibles and follow their patrons around quoting scripture at them. We must learn to be real within a secular context. We should be ready to explain our faith in terms that can be easily understood. Leave the door wide open for them to go deeper.
6. Be yourself. Do not get caught up in saying the right things. Just be yourself and allow God to show you where He is at work. Join Him there.
7. Be sensitive to the receptivity of those who work at the site. Building relationships with these workers is another way to establish an ongoing witnessing relationship. Follow these guidelines when reaching out to people who work at your ministry site:
  - a. It is not a good idea to start a conversation with a worker while he is conducting business (i.e. loading equipment, making a radio call)
  - b. If you are in the midst of a conversation and they are needed, step aside.
  - c. Do not assume you are allowed into employee areas.
  - d. When given the opportunity, inform them of after hour events at which time a conversation would be easier.

## PRAYER / MINISTRY HIKES

What is a Prayer/Ministry Hike?

Prayer walking in day use areas--Using your senses to listen for God's prompting as you are led along a trail or beside a popular recreation area to pray for those that you encounter and all those who might visit that place as well as using a prayer list to pray for request that have been made to the ministry.

Ministering as you are going—Offering cold bottles of water, first-aid supplies, or a helping hand to those you encounter as a way of beginning a conversation that your fellow team members will be praying will turn into a time of sharing spiritually.

Why do a Prayer/Ministry Hike?

Prayer is the foundation of all ministries. By continually flooding the area with prayers, strong holds are torn down and opportunities are discovered.

People often visit these areas seeking to be closer to God or at least closer to His creation.

Therefore, you are available to guide them to the Creator that they need.

People often visit these areas as an attempt to run from their problems. Even if you do not get a chance to talk with them, you will have helped them by interceding for them.

Prayer is never a wasted activity!

What do you need for a Prayer/Ministry Hike?

A willingness to pray!

Backpacks to carry chilled water bottles and supplies

½ pint water bottles chilled and labeled *[We have designed a special label using Rev. 22:17b. If you would like to bring bottles with you, please let us know and we will send you the labels. We have only a limited number of bottles that we can supply.]*

First-aid supplies *[We have a kit that will suffice.]*

Towel (This is in case you need to help someone who is in the water.)

A good pair of comfortable hiking shoes

How do you do it?

Before going to the area, have a time of prayer seeking God's leadership for the hike.

Divide the group into teams of two or three. These smaller teams will be able to pull aside to approach people with out intimidating them with the whole group.

Listen to the hike leaders. They will help to instruct you along the way. They will have insights into the people and some prayer needs that you will not know about.

Respect others privacy. Only approach those people who have recognized your presence and invited you over.

Always leave the area cleaner then you found it and do not allow water bottles to be left littering the area.

Remember your reason for being there, prayer and ministry. Do not be afraid to use obvious prayer postures.

Close out with thanksgiving to God for what He has done and shown you.